

Michigan Law Review

Volume 82 | Issue 2

1983

Frank R. Kennedy

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Jaffe, Snider, Raitt & Heuer, Detroit, Michigan

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Recommended Citation

Lawrence K. Snider, *Frank R. Kennedy*, 82 MICH. L. REV. 200 (1983).

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol82/iss2/5>

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FRANK R. KENNEDY

*Lawrence K. Snider**

Frank Kennedy was new to the Law School faculty during my student days and somehow, to my everlasting regret, I missed taking his bankruptcy and debtor-creditor courses. These losses soon became more than academic to me, as I began specializing in bankruptcy and insolvency law almost immediately upon graduation. Fortunately, Frank was generous enough to teach his subject by telephone to a young practitioner.

Of course I relied upon his scholarly writings in the bankruptcy area. But whenever I encountered a particularly perplexing problem, I knew I could call Frank for guidance, assurance and, most importantly, hopefully, the answer. Despite a busy schedule which included much in addition to the instruction of his law school students, Frank always found time for my questions.

To my amazement and occasional despair (were all lawyers expected to know so much?), Frank instantly and infallibly knew the cases relevant to my problem, and could (and did) summon up their salient facts, holdings, dates of decision and, usually, the names and histories of the deciding judges. The one thing Frank would never give me was a simple answer. Yet, by the time he finished, I always felt I understood my problem — and the practice of bankruptcy law — more fully. Sometimes I still might not know what to do next in the case I had called about, but I always knew that Frank's telephonic tutorials were very special gifts which placed me greatly in his debt in every sense but the one we both use professionally.

Once, while trying to teach a bankruptcy course during a hectic period at my office, I complained to Frank about the appalling number of hours it took an amateur professor like me to prepare for class. Frank surprised me by claiming it took him just as long. It had never occurred to me that "Mr. Bankruptcy," who always seemed to have the entire corpus of bankruptcy law at his fingertips, would need much time to plan a lesson. I wondered whether Frank was just giving me a pep talk. Later, after I met Frank's lovely and gracious wife, Pat, I learned he really did spend hours each day pre-

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paring to teach. Pat explained that Frank is an inveterate pack rat, searching out and saving every newspaper story, magazine article and other document mentioning the words "bankruptcy," "debtor" or "creditor." This has been Frank's life-long habit, and he has amassed a collection of heroic proportions.

What Frank meant by preparation had nothing to do with the study of recent cases and statutory amendments. Keeping abreast of the law in his field, like breathing, is an involuntary reflex for Frank. For him, preparing for class meant sifting through his vast store of clippings in search of the perfect anecdote to illustrate and illuminate the point he wanted his students to grasp. Often his anecdotes were amusing, helping to make the learning process as painless as possible. In any event, one welcome side-effect of Frank's penchant for collecting is that it reduces the odds that his retirement will mean a move from Ann Arbor. A move would mean relocating the entire collection, too laborious a task to contemplate, or, equally unthinkable, leaving behind the source of his famous anecdotes.

Of course, there was always more to Frank's teaching than snappy stories. His ability to clarify and illuminate the complexities of bankruptcy law has made him a superb teacher not only of a generation of law students, but of thousands of practitioners as well. For many years now, Frank's name on a lecture program has assured healthy attendance and a successful program. This is because Frank has earned a measure of respect in his field which few aspire to, much less achieve. His scholarly writings are benchmarks in the area. His tenure as Reporter to the Commission on the Bankruptcy Laws of the United States was distinguished. As the Reporter, Frank was instrumental in proposing a complete modernization of an outdated and outmoded bankruptcy system. While neither Frank nor the Commission were completely successful, their accomplishments were significant. Frank has continually striven to bring excellence and a semblance of "fair play" to our bankruptcy system.

It probably is a good thing my personal debt to Frank does not appear on my financial statement. If it did, I might have to retain his services in a different capacity than teacher. Although I'll never really be able to repay Frank for his many kindnesses, I can at least state the obvious on his behalf: Frank Kennedy has been a tremendous credit to the Law School. He has earned our greatest admiration and respect. I promise not to interrupt his retirement too frequently with phone calls pleading for advice and, of course, the answer.